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New York

President:	Mr. González de Linares Palou	(Spain)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	France	Mrs. Gueguen Mohsen
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Coleman
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermudez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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The meeting was called to order at 4.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic; and Mr. Taye-Brook Zerihoun, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

Mr. Sidikou is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Kinshasa.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

After consultations among Council members, I have been authorized to make the following statement on their behalf:

"Following the visit of the Security Council to the Democratic Republic of Congo from 11 to 13 November, the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the Council regarding the situation in the country:

"The Security Council is monitoring very closely the recent political development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and remains concerned about the risk for destabilization of the country and the region as a whole in the absence of a swift and consensual resolution to the current political crisis, as illustrated by the violence of 19 and 20 September 2016.

"The Security Council thanks the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and all its interlocutors for the fruitful discussions that have taken place during this visit.

"The Security Council acknowledges the political agreement reached on 18 October 2016 and takes note of the appointment of the new Prime Minister. The Security Council is encouraged by the unanimous commitment of Congolese actors to prevent destabilization and to continue inclusive discussions in order to reach a broad consensus towards free, fair, credible, inclusive, transparent, peaceful and timely presidential and legislative elections leading to a peaceful transfer of power in accordance with the Congolese Constitution for the stability, development and consolidation of constitutional democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"The Security Council further calls on political groups that did not sign the political agreement to remain engaged in dialogue. The Security Council welcomes commitments to respect and preserve the Constitution in letter and spirit and looks forward to the implementation of further confidence-building measures to ease tensions and build consensus.

"The Security Council welcomes the ongoing mediation efforts led by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO) and calls on all political actors to continue working in good faith and in a spirit of compromise towards a swift political solution, before 19 December 2016, that paves the way for peaceful, credible, inclusive and timely elections as soon as possible in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council further encourages the region to pursue its efforts in support of the mediation.

"The Security Council urges the Government, as well as all relevant parties to ensure an environment conducive to free, fair, credible, inclusive, transparent and elections, as recalled in resolution 2277 (2016), which includes a free and constructive political debate, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of assembly, equitable access to media, including State media, safety and the freedom of movement for all candidates, as well as for election observers and witnesses, journalists, human rights defenders and actors from civil society, including women.

"The Security Council calls on the authorities to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially the right of peaceful assembly, and to exercise maximum restraint in their response to

protests, and also calls upon the opposition forces, for their part, to show responsibility by ensuring the peaceful character of their demonstrations.

"The Security Council reiterates its call upon all political parties, their supporters and other political actors to exercise maximum restraint in their actions and statements, to refrain from violence, violent speeches or other provocations and to address their differences peacefully. The Security Council also calls on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to hold accountable those responsible for the killings on 19 and 20 September and for all human rights violations and abuses. The Security Council takes note of the recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo of the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

"The Security Council stresses the importance for the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its national partners to take all necessary steps to accelerate the preparations for the elections without further delays, including by expediting the update of the voter registry.

"The Security Council is also deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation, which continues to severely affect the civilian population in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and the persistence of violence in that area, in particular in North Kivu Province where nearly 840,000 people were internally displaced as of 30 September 2016 and more than 700 civilians have been killed since October 2014. The Security Council urges authorities to hold accountable those deemed responsible for the acts of violence.

"The Security Council calls on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take further action, in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, as applicable, and with the support of MONUSCO in accordance with its mandate, to end the threat posed by the Allied Democratic Forces, the Forces Democratiques de Libération du Rwanda and all other armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council encourages further cooperation between the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo and MONUSCO in tackling this violence and continue their efforts to neutralize armed groups operating in eastern Congo.

"The Security Council reiterates its full support to MONUSCO and its appreciation for the Special Representative's leadership in trying to ease tensions. The Security Council urges MONUSCO to fully implement its protection of civilians mandate, including to respond to current and ongoing security threats and reminds troop- and police-contributing countries of the need for a comprehensive approach and to take all necessary measures to carry out MONUSCO's mandate as set forth in resolution 2277 (2016).

"The Security Council welcomes the regional initiatives and efforts by regional States to promote peace, stability and democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to enhance cooperation towards the neutralization of armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the establishment by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda of a Joint Follow-up Mechanism and encourages further action. The Security Council extends its thanks to Angola, Chair of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, for the fruitful discussions held in Luanda on 14 November 2016. The Security Council also welcomes in that regard the reform of the governing mechanisms of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, including the decision to hold an annual high-level meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism in a signatory State, with a view to strengthening regional ownership of the Framework.

"The Security Council expresses its determination to continue to closely follow the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular the security conditions on the ground and the efforts to successfully conclude the electoral process."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2016/18.

I now give the floor to Mr. Sidikou.

Mr. Sidikou (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to speak to you and the Council about the situation in the

Democratic Republic of Congo since your visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in November.

My statement will focus on the political situation, with particular emphasis on the good offices undertaken by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO) and the arrangements made by the Mission with regard to the deadline of 19 December and the security situation in particular in the eastern part of the country.

Two weeks after the constitutional end of President Kabila's second and last term, and more than six weeks after the signing of the comprehensive political agreement of 18 October, on peaceful, credible and transparent elections, the political situation remains uncertain. The good offices led by CENCO since early November, with the endorsement of President Kabila and which had aroused great hope for a peaceful exit from the political impasse, seem or seemed to be fading. In complex situations, appearances can sometimes be misleading.

The positions of the key players, namely, those of the presidential majority and the Rassemblement des forces politiques et sociales acquises au changement — known as the Rassemblement de l'opposition — appear not to have changed. The presidential majority continues to reject a second dialogue and the Rassemblement insists on a truly inclusive dialogue. A few moments ago I learned, through a presidential communiqué, that President Kabila just relaunched the CENCO initiative in person, called on it to pursue its mission and assured it of his full support.

(*spoke in English*)

While we are steadfastly continuing our good offices engagement with the Government, the security services, political parties and civil society, we are now fast approaching the symbolic date of 19 December and the period going into early next year with a sense of apprehension. In that context and drawing lessons from the violent events of 19 and 20 September, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has further updated its contingency plans and is further adjusting its posture and deployment to mitigate politically driven violence and protect civilians, to the extent possible within its available resources and in its areas of deployment.

Specifically, the Mission has reinforced its presence and coordination mechanism in Kinshasa to implement our protection of civilian mandates, within capacity, while the force and police continue to carry out day and night patrols in Kinshasa, as well as in other parts of the country. We have also established in Kinshasa, Goma and Lubumbashi three mobile teams to monitor and report on human rights violations and restrictions of political space. Those teams are designed to deploy into areas that are without a permanent MONUSCO presence but are deemed at high risk of politically driven violence. The Mission is also coordinating its plans with the United Nations country team, in particular with regard to the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilian populations that may be displaced by such violence.

Let me stress here that those efforts may not be fully sufficient to mitigate or respond adequately to any major outbreak of politically related violence. First and foremost, it is the political will of the main political actors that will determine how the existing and real tensions are managed and whether or not they degenerate into violence. Secondly, the force and police capabilities available to the Mission in Kinshasa are stretched thin. Furthermore, as the Mission fine-tunes its plans to ensure the safety and security of its personnel and facilities, we are cognizant of the fact that there may well be requests from the diplomatic community and other actors present in Kinshasa for support, which would further stretch the Mission's limited capacities. My senior colleagues and I will continue to work with the Secretariat to address those challenges, and I am grateful for the support of the Council in those matters.

Going forward, it is my hope that the efforts of CENCO, with the support of countries of the region, in particular the Republic of Angola and the Republic of Congo, will eventually broker a rapprochement between the presidential majority and the Rassemblement de l'opposition. Such a rapprochement would contribute to averting violence on 19 December and in the period immediately following, and in the medium term also contribute to a peaceful transition process required for a credible electoral process. I would therefore like to encourage the members of the Council to reinforce the message that it conveyed to the Congolese political actors during their visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo last month, namely, that they remain primarily responsible and accountable for the peace and stability of their country. I hope that the Council

might also express its appreciation for the efforts of CENCO to facilitate a détente between the Government and the Rassemblement.

It is also important for the Council to urge the Prime Minister-designate, Mr. Samy Badibanga, to finalize his commitments with all stakeholders in order to form an inclusive transitional Government to promote a spirit of reconciliation and lead the country through a peaceful and stable transition period.

I would like to conclude by highlighting the fact that, in this period of political uncertainty, the deteriorating economic situation is also having an adverse impact on the stability of the country. Socioeconomic factors constitute an important potential trigger for violence during this period. I would therefore like to echo the Prime Minister-designate's personal appeal to me, when I met with him on 1 December, and his request for the international community's support as his Government intends to re-engage international financial institutions in that regard.

Finally, we must be cautious that the focus on political events in Kinshasa and our preparations to mitigate election-related violence do not distract us from our operations against armed groups in the eastern part of the country. The situation in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remains cause for concern and could well be exacerbated by armed groups and criminal networks capitalizing on the political uncertainty at the national level, thereby compounding the risks faced by the civilian population. The spill-over effect of the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, the growing number of South Sudanese refugees arriving in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the presence of armed actors along the border between South Sudan the Democratic Republic of the Congo are also of increasing concern. We must continue to monitor those developments very closely. MONUSCO will therefore continue in a determined manner in its coordinated operations with the Congolese Armed Forces against armed groups to ensure the protection of civilians in the eastern part of the country and with the Congolese police to strengthen the rule of law.

On regional matters that impact the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I will also continue my close coordination and collaboration with Special Envoy Djinnit in our diplomatic efforts at regional level.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Sidikou for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Zerihoun.

Mr. Zerihoun: I thank you, Sir, and members of the Security Council for this opportunity to brief everyone on electoral developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Special Representative of the Secretary-General Sidikou has just briefed everyone on the political and security developments, as well the measures taken by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to provide support and enhance the protection of civilians. I will therefore limit my remarks to what the United Nations has done to support the electoral process.

In resolution 2277 (2016), the Security Council decided that the priority tasks of the United Nations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo should include the provision of technical assistance and logistical support for the revision of the electoral register. Accordingly, the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs undertook an advisory mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 24 April to 10 May, first, to assess the political environment and preparations for updating the voter register and polls; secondly, to assess the capacity of national institutions, including the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and that of the United Nations as it relates to the implementation of resolution 2277 (2016); and, thirdly, to consider the implications of the implementation for the United Nations in terms of human and financial resources.

The Mission made the assessment that United Nations and international support would be critical to allow the Independent National Electoral Commission to organize the voter registration exercise within the shortest time frame technically possible and that a political agreement among key stakeholders would be necessary to move elections preparations forward peacefully. In accordance with resolution 2277 (2016) and the findings of the advisory mission, the United Nations has been providing support to African Union (AU) facilitation and national stakeholders, including on technical issues pertaining to the electoral process.

As Council members are aware, the 18 October political agreement reached by the presidential majority and part of the opposition provides for a complete overhaul of the voter register by 31 July 2017 and the holding of presidential and legislative elections

simultaneously. It also provides for the possibility of holding local elections on the same day, financial and technical conditions permitting, or within six months following the general elections. Under the agreement, elections would be announced on 30 October 2017, following which CENI is expected to organize the general elections within 6 months — meaning, by April 2018. The agreement also calls on the Government to provide CENI with the logistical and financial resources necessary for the completion of the electoral process.

The timeline suggested by the agreement presents some advantages, including shorter deadlines than the one initially envisaged by CENI, which cuts down the number of days required to organize the elections. However, it is worth noting that this would be the first time for CENI to embark on such a herculean electoral undertaking with such serious logistics implications. Needless to say, the continued support of the international community, including through financial assistance, will be crucial to ensure the success of the electoral process. Furthermore, broadening the base of the political consensus and the acceptance of the electoral timeline by national stakeholders will be critical, given that the only peaceful way out of the current stalemate will be through a negotiated solution.

On 31 July, the voter registration exercise was launched in Gbadolite, which is in Nord-Ubangui province. The registration process is planned to take place in two phases. The first phase is a pilot project, and the second will be staggered over four operational areas to cover approximately 17,500 registration centres throughout the remaining 25 provinces of the country. The pilot project in Nord-Ubangui was completed on 31 October. As of 1 December, almost 90 per cent of the 850,000 prospective voters had been registered. About 45 per cent of them are women. CENI has started preparations for the second phase and the voter registration will be simultaneously launched in the middle of December, in two operational areas covering 12 provinces. In the meantime, registration agents are being trained and the deployment of registration material is under way.

In accordance with resolution 2277 (2016), the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have been providing logistical and technical expertise to concerned national stakeholders for the registration process. MONUSCO logistics support alone includes the transportation of more than 3,500 tons of registration materials to 16 main hubs and to at least 104 of the 225 antenna sites. CENI is taking care of the remainder of the antenna sites and the registration centres. Since 28 October, MONUSCO has provided four cargo planes and 16 helicopters to CENI, and since then 520 tons of registration materials have been transferred by the Mission from Kinshasa to other provinces. In addition, MONUSCO has provided support for the deployment of 50 voter registration agents.

Council members will recall that in 2015, UNDP established an electoral project further to the recommendations of the 2013 electoral needs assessment mission. However, the capacities of the project to provide assistance are stretched to the breaking point. Out of a project budget of $123 million, only about $10 million have been mobilized. Financial constraints continue to prevent UNDP from properly staffing the project and implementing planned activities.

MONUSCO and the Secretariat are also taking administrative steps aimed at providing the United Nations with the material and human resources necessary to undertake the technical and logistical support to CENI. As recommended by the advisory mission, the MONUSCO electoral division is being established with a view to putting in place an integrated electoral assistance team that brings together UNDP and the MONUSCO electoral division. The Department of Political Affairs is providing support to the process through the electoral roster. In addition to the electoral expert deployed to support AU facilitation, the Department of Political Affairs has deployed its principal electoral officer, based at the United Nations Office to the African Union in Addis Ababa, to spearhead the Mission's electoral support efforts, pending the recruitment of a director for the electoral division of MONUSCO.

On 31 October, a joint centre comprising experts from CENI and the United Nations was established to better coordinate voter registration operations. United Nations support to the voter registration process is being provided amid a very challenging political, financial and security environment. Moreover, the electoral calendar and the funding of the process by the Government are still not fully clear. Out of an electoral budget of over $1 billion, the Government is committed to disbursing $300 million in 2016. However, while the Government paid $20 million monthly from January to June and similar monthly allotments in Congolese

francs from July to September, it reportedly has not disbursed any funds since October.

Despite the challenges faced by the political process, the international community will need to exert additional effort to help improve the political environment surrounding preparations for the elections, most notably with a view to securing a level playing field, as well as to providing necessary technical and financial assistance. It is essential that MONUSCO and UNDP be provided the means to deliver on their commitments and mandates.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Zerihoun for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. To that end, the presidency will use the flashing lights on the collars of the microphones to prompt speakers to bring their remarks to a close.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We note the effective efforts of Special Envoy of African Union, Mr. Edem Kodjo, in assisting the successful conclusion of the intra-Congolese political dialogue and the signing of the political agreement of 18 October. We are corvinced that that agreement will play a role in ensuring political stability in the very difficult time leading up to the election. We commend the 17 November appointment of Mr. Samy Badibanga to the post of Prime Minister as the first step in implementing the agreement. We call on the political forces in the country that have not signed the agreement to continue to participate in the political process.

We are convinced that the interpretation of the agreement with respect to defining the update of the voter register and the concrete time frame for holding the presidential election should be determined by the Congolese people themselves. The intervention of external players on the pretext of imposing their psuedo-recommendations for organizing the electoral process and broadening the political space is unacceptable. Such actions are liable to violate the equilibrium that has been achieved with such difficulty. We should refrain from interpreting Congolese fundamental law, because the country has its own Constitutional Court, which on 11 May ruled concerning the procedure for the termination of the powers of the President and parliamentarians.

We regret the victims of 20 and 21 September demonstrations. However, we suggest that it would be logical to talk about human rights violations only after the investigations have been completed and the role played by opposition leaders in provoking the unrest and violence against Government representatives has been assessed.

The main reason for the Democratic Republic of the Congo's place on the Security Council's agenda is the fact that the conflict has not been resolved and illegal armed groups remain active in the eastern regions of the country. We are pleased to note the full cooperation that has been established between the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Government of the country, and we pay tribute to the personal efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Maman Sidikou.

We hope that the re-establishment of full-scale joint operations of the MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade and the Congolese army to neutralize illegal armed groups, will ultimately help to eliminate the security vacuum in the eastern part of the country. We also commend Kinshasa's efforts to improve its cooperation on security issues with the Governments of neighbouring Uganda and Rwanda. We believe it important for States members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) to step up their efforts to ensure the implementation by all signature countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. In that regard, we note the efforts being made by ICGLR under the presidency of Angola. We call for the provisions of the Framework to be invoked in addressing the problem concerning the arrival of supporters of the former First Vice-President of South Sudan, Mr. Machar, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in August.

The problems of the region cannot be resolved through force. We need to implement plans for the disarmament, demobilization and repatriation of former fighters of the Mouvement du 23 mars. So far steps have been made in that area only by the Democratic Republic of the Congo itself. It is important that MONUSCO remain impartial and limit itself strictly to its Security Council mandate on the eve of the elections. We are

convinced that a close partnership with Kinshasa will allow the Mission to fulfil its role of stabilization.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Our meeting today is taking place shortly after the very important meeting that the Security Council organized in mid-November (see S/PV.7819). Today's meeting clearly highlights the importance that the Security Council attaches to the latest developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We acknowledge the impact of the events in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the stability of the Great Lakes region and the region as a whole. I would like to make a few comments in that regard.

It goes without saying that the upcoming elections, as outlined in the Constitution, are of special and indeed historical importance for the fate of the country. They will enhance stability, the constitutional order and the country's institutions. In that light, Egypt insists on the importance of the political agreement that was reached thanks to the mediation of Mr. Kodjo, paving the way for free and peaceful elections. We welcome the measures that have been taken to implement the agreement, particularly the nomination of a new Prime Minister. The credibility of the agreement naturally depends on its appropriate implementation without further delay, including preparations for the elections, ensuring their transparency, adopting confidence-building measures, protecting the fundamental freedoms of citizens, and ensuring the freedom of the press, within the framework of the law.

In addition to the implementation of the agreement, all political actors must work to build a broad consensus in order to ensure the stability necessary for the organization of the elections in accordance with the Constitution. We welcome the efforts being undertaken to that end, in particular those of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo. We call on all political actors to contribute to those efforts and to demonstrate flexibility. We urge them to seek ways to overcome their differences and conflicts in order to preserve and guarantee the stability and security of the country. In that context, Egypt strongly welcomes presidential statement S/PRST/2016/18, adopted by the Council today, which refers to our ongoing support for those efforts.

I would like to say a word on the very important role played by the African Union and other regional organizations, in particular the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region under the leadership of Angola, which has played a very important role in what has been achieved so far. We need to step up our efforts to overcome the remaining difficulties.

I further note that the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be decided solely by its own people and institutions country. Respect for the Constitution is incumbent on all national actors, while the international community must also respect the sovereignty, independence and Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is indeed an essential factor for preserving peace and security there.

I would like to very briefly focus on the situation in the east of the country. I have made two visits to the country over the past few months, first with the Council and also within the framework of the Committee pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), which Egypt has the honour of chairing. On both occasions I was able to see first-hand the suffering of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the horrible living conditions they endure in that part of the country.

In the context of the cooperation between the Congolese army and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, military operations have been bolstered, which has enabled significant progress against armed groups. Unfortunately, those efforts have not prevented those groups from committing crimes and violence against the civilian population, not to mention an increase in ethnic tensions, such as the attack on a camp in North Kivu. That, of course, has contributed to a deteriorating situation in the east of the country.

Furthermore, in order to find a lasting solution it is important to make progress on the issue of reconciliation. Tensions need to be eased and the grievances of the local population heeded, including those of refugees and displaced people. It is also important to combat impunity, ensure the rule of law and expand the authority of the Government. We also need to improve the living conditions of the citizens. Lastly, we need to find a solution to the crisis characterized by the illegal export of natural resources, because it threatens the economic development of the country.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Sidikou and Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun for their briefings.

The political process in the Democratic Republic of Congo is at a critical junction. President Kabila and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo are committed to advancing national dialogue, safeguarding State stability and promoting economic and social development, which China welcomes.

In the meantime, the security situation in the country remains quite fragile. The achievement of lasting peace, prosperity and development is an arduous task and has a long way to go. It therefore needs continued support from the international community. The Council visited the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola in early November, which reflects the importance that the Security Council attaches to the issue of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. China would like to make the following observations on this issue.

First, we resolutely promote the political process in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the relevant opposition parties have signed a political agreement tht covers the election schedule, the establishment of a political transition and the appointment of a new Prime Minister. China welcomes those developments. We call on the opposition parties that are not yet part of the national dialogue to sign onto the the political agreement as soon as possible, resolve their differences through dialogue and dedicate themselves to the peace, stability and development of the country. The international community should respect the development path independently chosen by the Democratic Republic of Congo and, on the basis of respecting the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of Congo, provide constructive assistance to the political process.

Secondly, we vigorously promote security and stability in the country. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Democratic Republic of Congo governing forces have made positive headway in their fight against armed groups. Countries in the Great Lakes region are interdependent; their security is closely connected. China encourages countries in the region to continue with the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region. Furthermore, it calls on them to make more progress in the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration and in their response to the threat posed by armed groups.

Thirdly, the roles of regional and subregional organizations should have full play. The African Union (AU) has played an important role in facilitating national dialogue in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) held a high-level meeting on the topic and issued a communiqué, which demonstrates the support of countries in the region for a political settlement of the problem. The United Nations should give full play to the comparative advantages of regional and subregional organizations, such as the AU and ICGLR, thereby strengthening coordination and cooperation with each other with a view to creating synergy. China appreciates and supports the positive role of MONUSCO in promoting peace aad stability in the Democratic Republic of Congo and advancing the political process, including disarmament and demobilization.

The Chinese Government has always supported the peace process of the Democratic Republic of Congo and, over the years, has provided assistance to its nation-building efforts within its capacity. We have also sent peacekeepers to MONUSCO. Along with the broader international community, China stands ready to continue our constructive role in the realization of peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Mr. Taula (New Zealand): There has been no shortage of warnings to the Security Council regarding the risk of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The failure to undertake timely preparations for the electoral list were apparent a year ago. And in July, the Deputy Secretary-General warned the Security Council (see S/PV.7732) that violence and instability associated with a political crisis could still preventable if an inclusive political agreement could be reached. We saw early signs of that instability and violence manifest itself, with dozens killed on 19 and 20 September. But a slow, burning situation can be among the most challenging for the Security Council to address when we are confronted with so many emergencies at the same time. And influencing the parties in a situation that has been on the Security Council's agenda for so long is not easy. Visiting missions, like the one we undertook last month, is important in order to engage directly with the Governments and other stakeholders, listen to them and deliver messages from Council members directly to the parties.

We are pleased that we have now agreed on a common set of messages in today's presidential

statement S/PRST/2016/18. That is an important outcome, although ideally it would have been preferable to issue the statement closer to the time of the visit. There are a few points that deserve particular emphasis.

First, the Congolese political leadership — both in Government and opposition — must heed the calls from the Council to act with a spirit of compromise to achieve a consensus political agreement on the path ahead, building on the 18 October agreement and before the scheduled end of the President's current term at the end of December.

Secondly, political leaders on all sides need to encourage a political environment in which the Congolese can freely engage, with freedom of assembly and the media, while avoiding incitement of violence.

Thirdly, as was underscored by our visit and meetings in Luanda, the region is among those first to face the implications of conflict, and it has a key role to play in building support for an inclusive political agreement.

The Congolese continue to suffer from insecurity in the eastern parts of the country. When we were in Beni last month, we saw the fear and anger felt by Congolese who are suffering from appalling human rights abuses. While addressing the immediate political crisis in Kinshasa, we must also remain engaged on the imperative of stabilizing the security situation in the east, protecting civilians, neutralizing armed groups, such as Allied Democratic Force and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, and establishing accountability for the human rights abuses that have taken place. The Congolese authorities have the lead role to play in achieving that, supported by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). At the same time, MONUSCO must devote resources and be well prepared for conflict risks associated with the political crisis. The missions ongoing contingency-planning efforts are particularly important in that regard, as outlined by Mr. Sidikou.

Finally, we would have seen real value in Assistant Secretary-General Andrew Gilmour participating in this briefing to share his observations on his recent visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo and the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights inside the country. Indeed, the linkage between human rights abuses as a potential driver of conflict could not be clearer than the present circumstances.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Maman Sambo Sidikou, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Tayé-Brook Zerihoun, for their comprehensive briefings.

I would like to once more reiterate Uruguay's commitment to stability and peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo, not just as an elected member of the Security Council but also as a country that has contributed troops to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in an uninterrupted fashion over the past 16 years.

As referred to in presidential statement S/PRST/2016/18, the Security Council undertook a field visit a little less than a month ago and the messages that were conveyed focused on the political and security situation in the country. The Democratic Republic of Congo finds itself at a decisive moment in its history in political terms. Furthermore, both the Congolese population and the international community have great expectations vested in the holding of free, transparent, inclusive and credible elections.

Political stakeholders, who should act in the interests of the nation and its inhabitants, have the enormous responsibility of achieving the necessary consensus to hold credible elections without unjustified delays, so as to avoid any escalation of tension or violence. Uruguay wishes to reiterate its call to political groups that have yet to join the dialogue process to do so and play a constructive role that can contribute to the proper holding of elections.

Of concern are the complaints of violations of civil and political rights, including violations of the freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, that have been committed, inter alia, by forces or personnel linked to the Government. It would be better for the persons responsible for such violations be brought to justice to account for their acts sooner rather than later. Uruguay wishes to emphasize that it will be of great importance during the preparation, development and implementation of the election process that all necessary guarantees be provided for the monitoring, protection and promotion of human rights.

Unfortunately, many rulers in Africa and still more in other parts of the world are calling for constitutional reforms when they wish to extend their terms in office. Every constitution involves laborious negotiations in which almost all political actors and parties and civil society organizations of a country participate. A constitution also implies a delicate and balanced social, political and legal pact in which all the citizens of a country subscribe to or have what is referred to in English as "ownership" of the country's *magna carta*.

Reforming constitutions with the sole objective of extending elected terms of office or of allowing for persons in power to be re-elected has proved to be a misguided and damaging practice for the political and democratic evolution of States over the past 40 years. One day, all Governmental leaders without exception will understand that the essence of democracy is the regular holding of general elections in accordance with constitutional guarantees and that what is important about that is seeing political alternation among different political parties as natural and healthy for society as a whole. We hope that the unanimous political messages delivered by the members of the Council during their recent visit to the country are echoed throughout the political class and the population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Finally, Uruguay wishes to pay tribute to each and every one of the officials deployed in MONUSCO who have been making an enormous sacrifice on a daily basis to contribute to the peace and stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They are, without a doubt, the true guarantee that this entire process comes to fruition.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): I wish to the thank the briefers, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Sidikou and Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun, for their update on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Continued monitoring and reporting by the United Nations on developments on the ground are crucial at this critical juncture.

Over the past decade, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has made great strides in overcoming its conflict-ridden past and shown immense determination in addressing remaining challenges to peace and security. Consolidating democratic gains and setting the stage for a peaceful transition of power in accordance with the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we believe, is a key step to securing the lasting peace and stability desired.

The current long-simmering political impasse over electoral processes is therefore deeply worrying and poses an immediate challenge that risks undoing the positive gains we have recently seen in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council travelled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo last month to show solidarity with the Congolese people, with a view to improving the political and security situation, including through supporting efforts for credible, transparent and inclusive elections. In this regard, we welcome the presidential statement adopted today (S/PRST/2016/18), and, in our national capacity, we wish to reiterate some of the key messages contained therein.

First, all parties agree that sincere and inclusive dialogue is the only path to peacefully resolving the political impasse. The agreement reached on 18 October in the context of the national dialogue was an important first step towards resolution. However, it is clear that more inclusive engagement is needed to achieve an outcome that all Congolese stakeholders can rally behind.

Secondly, we urge all political stakeholders to return to the negotiating table in good faith and engage in dialogue towards a swift and consensual way forward. In this regard, we emphasize our support for the mediation efforts of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo.

Thirdly, it is imperative that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all political leaders issue strong messages to their supporters that violence is unacceptable. This warning must be backed by quick and impartial measures to investigate all cases of violence and hold perpetrators or instigators to account.

Fourthly, we call for the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and all political stakeholders to continue taking confidence-building measures to mitigate tensions and create an environment conducive to dialogue. We appeal to all stakeholders to act responsibly and refrain from rhetoric and actions that could exacerbate the situation.

While the fate and future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo rests in Congolese hands alone, we call on the regional and international communities to lend their full and proactive support to mitigating

tensions, averting the risk of violence and ensuring that the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains on the path of peace and security.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for this urgent meeting. I am very grateful for the sobering analysis just shared by our briefers.

As we have heard so clearly, the clock is ticking for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the world is watching. Just two weeks remain until President Kabila's second term comes to an end — two weeks to prevent even more violence, even more deaths and even more conflict in a country that has already suffered too much. So here in this open meeting we have an opportunity to send an unequivocal message to President Kabila that he must make the right choice, respect the Constitution, respect the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, respect his two-term limit, commit not to stand, and hold elections as soon as possible. In truth, there is no other option. We all know what comes next if he makes the wrong decision. We saw it in the bloodied streets of Kinshasa in September. We cannot allow such barbarity to be repeated in a fortnight's time.

We know what needs to happen. The Constitution is clear. President Kabila's term ends on 19 December. The two-term limit cannot be changed, and certainly not just to suit one man's political agenda. The Government must reach a consensual political agreement that is in line with the Constitution before that date. President Kabila heard this message loudly and clearly when the Security Council visited last month. It is a message that the United Kingdom's Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development, James Wharton, repeated only two weeks ago.

It is now time for Kabila and his Government to undertake confidence-building measures so that can mediation efforts have a chance of success. This means dropping the spurious charges against opposition members, releasing political prisoners and lifting the media ban. It also means that all sides must reject violence and commit to peaceful dialogue. In these efforts, we fully support the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo and the mediated discussions between the Government and opposition groups. We urge all parties to continue to engage in dialogue to reach a peaceful compromise before 19 December.

But that is only half of the message that we need to send today. If President Kabila ignores the Council, we must be clear that there will be consequences. It cannot be business as usual if nothing has changed in two weeks' time. The Government must respect human rights and fundamental freedoms essential to political debate and credible elections, freedom of speech and assembly, access to the media and accountability for human rights abuses. Not respecting these fundamental norms increases tensions and heightens the risk of violence.

In October, the European Union threatened to impose sanctions on members of the Democratic Republic of the Congo security forces responsible for the suppression of these fundamental freedoms and the abuse of human rights. The Council needs to be prepared to respond in a similar fashion if the situation deteriorates. In parallel, we also need to be preparing to help, should the worst occur. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo needs to have contingency planning in place to respond effectively if needed. The biggest peacekeeping mission in the world, with a clear mandate to protect civilians robustly, cannot stand by if civilians are threatened.

As I said at the start, the world is watching. But it is watching us in the Council just as much as it is watching President Kabila. We have seen countless times how difficult it is to bring peace and stability to a country or region after conflict has begun. We are discussing here a situation where the violence has not yet erupted. We have an opportunity to stop a conflict before it begins, so we owe it to the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to the credibility of the Security Council on conflict prevention to make sure that President Kabila listens.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): We are grateful to you, Mr. President, and to the briefers.

Just recently, the Council had an important occasion and a prime opportunity to deliver our concerns directly to the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Joseph Kabila. The political agreement of 18 October 2016 can be seen as an indication of political will among a large part of the national stakeholders to prevent the destabilization of the country.

At the same time, it is, in our opinion, only a starting point in the long process of resolving accumulated disagreements and problems among all political actors. Therefore, the continuation of an inclusive dialogue among all national stakeholders in order to hold free, fair and credible, inclusive and transparent elections in

the Democratic Republic of the Congo should be the next, obvious step. There is no other way to address this already complicated situation.

If the situation descends into violence, there will be no winners, only losers. Ukraine calls on all national stakeholders to continue the dialogue and find common ground for a nationwide compromise as soon as possible.

The deaths of protesters during the 19 and 20 September clashes this year are still fresh in our memory. Thus, considering the information that is incoming about preparations for public protests after 19 December, as was announced by some opposition parties, we call for maximum restraint and urge the Government to refrain from responding to provocative acts with force, which would only aggravate the fragile situation. Respect for human rights, particularly the freedom of assembly, freedom of opinion and expression, and equitable access to the media are of paramount importance for creating an environment conducive to the holding of future elections.

We call on all political actors to continue working in a spirit of compromise to reach a swift and consensual resolution of the current political crisis and prevent further destabilization of the country after 19 December.

We expect that this message, as well as today's statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/2016/18), will be heard by all parties concerned. The perpetual cycle of violence has to be broken; otherwise, our efforts will suffer the fate of the infamous rock of Sisyphus.

In conclusion, I want to recall a recent example that struck me deeply. In November, the United Nations peacekeeping Facebook page posted information about the excavation of an armoured fighting vehicle operated by Malaysian peacekeepers stationed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the early 1960s. The vehicle, inaugurated as a memorial to the first peacekeeping operation, was termed "a tangible symbol of the history of peacekeepers in the Congo". Below that post, someone wrote,

> "We do not need memorial pictures for a truck or tank. We need food, water, new shelter or a cruise ship to temporarily house these people in desperate need."

To me, it is a sobering reminder of the fact that in more than six decades, the United Nations presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo still has not fully succeeded in stabilizing that country. We should not let history repeat itself.

Ms. Coleman (United States of America): I wish at the outset to thank our briefers.

As we approach the constitutionally mandated end of President Kabila's term, on December 19, the United States is increasingly concerned about the risk of widespread violence and instability. We thank the African Union for facilitating the national dialogue that led to the October 18 accord, which was a good start but, unfortunately, lacked the buy-in of major opposition parties, lacked adequate guarantees to ensure a transfer of power and included in unnecessary delay in the timeline for presidential elections, a delay until April 2018.

The ongoing mediation efforts by the Congolese National Conference of Bishops (CENCO) are an important step towards improving the agreement and make it more inclusive. CENCO's efforts represent the best hope for reaching a consensus agreement among key stakeholders that ensures timely elections and a peaceful transition of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The United States is not alone in its support for CENCO's efforts or in our concern for the increasing risk of instability and violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During the Security Council's visit to Kinshasa, Council members agreed that the only way ahead was on a clear consensual path that could forestall violence and allow for elections and a transition of power. I would particularly like to thank France and Angola for their leadership during the Security Council trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola. The type of direct, united messaging that we heard during that visit was exactly what was needed.

The Security Council knows what is ahead if a consensual way forward is not found. The violence and loss of life that we have repeatedly seen in Kinshasa surrounding previous electoral periods and the deadly events of September 19 and 20 remind us of the need for consensus on holding presidential elections in 2017 and guaranteeing the country's first democratic transition of power. To ensure a smooth, peaceful transition, the

Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must take several steps.

First, the Democratic Republic of the Congo needs to protect political space and respect for human rights, including the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. When the Government cuts off legitimate means of expression, it forces individuals to use more confrontational methods to have their voices heard.

Secondly, it is now time for President Kabila to make a clear, public statement that he will not seek a third term.

Thirdly, the Democratic Republic of Congo also needs increased electoral safeguards to ensure free and fair elections, such as changes in the leadership of the Independent National Electoral Commission, guarantees for a transfer of power and an electoral timeline that holds presidential elections in 2017. On the technical side of the electoral process, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has known since 2011 the timing for elections and the need to revise the voter rolls. We are highly sceptical of the recent conclusion by the Commission that an election cannot be held until December 2018. A range of technical experts have indicated that presidential elections could take place in 2017. The Government's failure to move forward with undertaking and completing this task is not a technical problem. It is a problem of political will. We support CENCO's efforts to revisit the electoral calendar.

The Security Council preaches the mantra of preventive diplomacy, but to put these words into practice, the Council must maintain its pressure on the Democratic Republic of the Congo stakeholders to come to a consensual agreement on the way forward. We must also continue to press for respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and we must continue to press for a clear timeline and a path forward that ensure that elections proceed and that President Kabila steps down.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The Senegalese delegation, like others that spoke before it, would like to thank the briefers, Mr. Sidikou and Mr. Zerihoun, for their very constructive presentations. We also thank France for having taken the initiative to convene this meeting, which is evidence of its tireless commitment to this issue following its co-leadership, with Angola, of the visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Luanda. The presidential statement that we have just adopted (S/PRST/2016/18) is a further demonstration of the leadership of those two countries.

We are pleased to see the Council devote particular attention to the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is justified given the vital national and regional importance of the country's stability given the country's strategic position in the Great Lakes region, a region that has been beset for years now by complex security and political crises. During our visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we were able to see the complex realities on the ground, which remain characterized by various trends despite the clear progress represented by the political agreement of 18 October emanating from the political dialogue facilitated by the African Union.

In our opitnio, this agreement remains a good basis for our work, but needs to be consolidated by the commitment of the whole of the range of common stakeholders and also international partners support. That is why my delegation urges the Security Council to support the efforts of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo aimed at bringing together the positions of the political actors on the electoral process, the mechanisms for managing the transition and measures for re-establishing trust. And while we welcome Angola's efforts as Chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, we also encourage the African Union and the regional mechanisms and frameworks to continue to work for a peaceful political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo conducive to free, fair, credible, inclusive, transparent and peaceful presidential elections.

That goal is still attainable for the Congolese people, their political actors and the international community. The only issue that matters is enabling the Democratic Republic of the Congo to attain it. In our view, for the Security Council to do that, as it did during our visit there, it must with one voice encourage the country's political actors, civil society and its people as a whole, first, to explore further the inexhaustible possibilities of dialogue with, on the one hand, a formal, unequivocal commitment to peace and respect for human and civil rights and to preserving the people's life and property and ensuring public order and stability; and, on the other hand, to demonstrating a genuine willingness to seek compromise and reinforcing a spirit of mutual trust.

Secondly, the Council should urge the political actors, civil society and people of the Democratic

Republic of the Congo to engage in a peaceful, open and inclusive political process, which is still the only path that can lead to the calm, credible elections that we all desire. Clearly, we have to consider the financial challenge that the political process presents and that is crucial to its predictability. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, we must also act quickly or run the risk of seeing the economic and humanitarian situation deteriorate, exacerbate tensions and undermine the foundations of a peaceful political process. Lastly, the continued worrying situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo should absolutely not become a distraction from the essential task of focusing on the political process.

In this context, the challenge for the United Nations generally, and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in particular, is to maintain its level of engagement in the East regarding the protection of civilians and the fight against the armed groups in support of the Congolese security forces' actions. To that end, we believe it vital that the Mission's forces be reconfigured with the aim of dealing with the potential risk presented by the country's overall political and security situation in a very delicate electoral context. In that regard, and in conclusion, we would like to assure MONUSCO — which we warmly commend for its extraordinary efforts, considering the size and complexity of the problems it is dealing with and which, by the way, we were able to see for ourselves during our visit — that it has the continued support of the Senegalese delegation and of Senegal itself, which, as the Council knows, is a troop contributor to this important Mission.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): I would like to thank Special Representative Sidikou and Assistant Secretary-General Zerihoun for their briefings.

Japan welcomes the timely adoption today of presidential statement S/PRST/2016/18, following the Council's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo last month. With 19 December two weeks away, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is entering a critical phase on the peace and security front. Japan would like to urge the Congolese stakeholders to heed the following three points. First, the Government and the opposition should engage seriously in a direct dialogue. During the Council's visit to Kinshasa, I advocated strongly for ensuring that President Kabila and Mr. Tshisekedi have direct talks aimed at finding a way forward. Both parties should show leadership in that regard.

Secondly, preventing and avoiding mass violence is a responsibility shared by all Congolese parties, in the opposition as well as the Government. Violence in the streets must never become the last resort for achieving any political objectives. We very much hope that the opposition leaders will show how determined they are to prevent demonstrations from being spoiled by violence. I am very much in agreement with Mr. Sidikou when he rightly said that a display of political will on both sides is urgently needed.

Lastly, during our meeting in Kinshasa some members of the ruling party told us that logistical and financial difficulties were preventing them from organizing the elections on time. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is proud of its national institutions. Many African countries, including nations that are poorer than the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have succeeded in organizing elections. If the Democratic Republic of the Congo is united and determined to conduct this democratic exercise, I am confident that it will overcome its difficulties and hold successful elections. I hope that the strong message to that effect from the Security Council and the international community reaches the political leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Japan also reaffirms its full support for Special Representative Sidikou and for the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gimolieca (Angola): I would like to thank Mr. Zerihoun and Mr. Sidikou for their briefings on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Angola welcomed the signing on 18 October of a comprehensive political agreement on organizing peaceful, credible and transparent elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and notes with appreciation the confidence-building measures that the Government has taken so far, encouraging all the Congolese stakeholders to remain committed to peace and the political process. On 12 November, the Government of Angola issued a declaration on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, stating that it would be closely monitoring its neighbour's situation, based on the two countries' relations of friendship and cooperation and their historical and cultural ties, and affirming Angola's respect for the sovereignty of the

Democratic Republic of the Congo and its policy of non-interference in that country's affairs.

Angola believes that peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must be preserved, since they are crucial to peace and stability in the region, especially in central and southern Africa and the Great Lakes area. We also believe firmly that the country's ongoing political disputes must be resolved through dialogue and without violence or any other illegitimate means. While we affirm our support for a peaceful solution to the disputes between the Government and the opposition, we call on the parties concerned to maintain dialogue and negotiations as a means of finding a way out of their political and pre-electoral impasse and avoiding violent confrontation at all costs.

We also welcome the decision to entrust the post of Prime Minister to someone from the ranks of the opposition, who we encourage to engage in any inclusive dialogue as a key instrument to ending the crisis. Respect for the Constitution and other legal instruments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by the Government and the opposition are fundamental prerequisites, which presuppose that the President of the Republic can be replaced only through a democratic electoral process.

The appointment of Mr. Samy Badibanga as the new Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to lead the transitional Government is a key development in the complex political situation prevailing in the country and we encourage the Prime Minister to pursue negotiations for a national dialogue with all Congolese political actors and stakeholders. The recent announcement that elections will take place after the completion of voter registration be a positive sign of commitment to organizing elections in due course. It is our firm desire that the Congolese authority and the people be able to put their differences aside and engage in a transparent dialogue in order to establish an inclusive transitional Government and agree on a road map to guide the country to political stability, post-electoral peace and development.

Finally, we reiterate our support for the efforts of the African Union facilitation, led by Mr. Edem Kodjo and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mr. Maman Sidikou, and welcome the regional initiatives, in particular that of the International Conference of the Great Lakes region, aimed at strengthening synergies with the Security Council in line with the common vision expressed during the recent visit to Angola by the Security Council mission.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Mr. Sidikou and Mr. Zerihoun for their briefings. We are convinced that the agreement reached in October between the main political and social stakeholders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, within the framework of a national dialogue on organizing democratic, credible and transparent elections, is the foundation for a road map that will lead to the holding of presidential elections. In that regard, the establishment of a Government of national accord and the appointment of a new Prime Minister are positive achievements, in line with the agreement reached by the parties.

We believe that the national dialogue initiative must be ongoing and inclusive because it is perhaps a way to assist in achieving political and institutional stability. We are convinced that it will strengthen the climate of trust needed to achieve consensus among all political stakeholders, including those who are not yet part of the national dialogue. In that regard, the Security Council must continue to support the efforts at dialogue in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and initiatives of the support group for the facilitation of the national dialogue led by the African Union facilitator, the good offices of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community. All political stakeholders must be encouraged to participate in a constructive dialogue to dispel any institutional uncertainty in the coming days.

With regard to security, we remain concerned about the recurrence of violent incidents perpetrated by insurgent groups, Congolese and foreign alike, in north and south Kivu, which exacerbates a humanitarian situation with grave impact on the civilian population in the eastern part of the province. In addition, we are concerned about the rise in the number of internally displaced persons, clashes among communities and insecurity in the region. We believe that the decision on the steps to be taken now lies in the hands of the Congolese people without the intervention of external actors. The international community must assist the Congolese, in strict compliance with the principles of independent sovereignty, in the goal of preventing violence as a way to resolve political differences, which are a threat to the stability of the country and the region as a whole.

Ms. Gueguen Mohsen (France) (*spoke in French*): I will be brief. The Council has been clear and unanimous in presidential statement S/PRST/2016/18, which was read at the start of today's meeting. I will make three points.

First, the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains of concern. The country is at a critical juncture in terms of its political and security environment, and a fully inclusive political agreement has not yet been reached in spite of the messages conveyed during the visit of the Security Council and the mediation efforts of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, which we support and believe must continue. The temptation to be swept into a power struggle is present on all sides, but that game is a dangerous one. If the downward spiral of violence begins, no one will be able to predict how it might be stopped. It must be prevented at all costs.

Secondly, the Council must steadfastly pursue the preventive diplomacy efforts that it has undertaken since its visit to the country. We have been unanimous in reiterating the expectations of the Council with regard to Congolese political leaders by encouraging a full-fledged, consensus-based dialogue to peaceably settle ongoing disputes and by urging the Government to implement the confidence-building measures necessary to bring about a swift conclusion to the dialogue, such as the release of political prisoners, the end to judicial proceedings and the removal of obstacles to freedom of the press. The onus is on Congolese political stakeholders to take the steps necessary to maintain stability and hold elections as quickly as possible, in line with the provisions of the Constitution. To date, that has not occurred. We must therefore steer them in that direction.

Thirdly, that is indeed the goal of the presidential statement that we just adopted. France thanks all members of the Council for the constructive work that has allowed the text to be adopted by consensus. The presidential statement is a clear expression of the Council's expectations on confidence-building measures and the need for flexibility in a spirit of compromise. A political agreement that is more in-depth and inclusive must be swiftly reached. It is key to preventing a major political crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that could destabilize the entire region.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Spain.

My statement will be brief because almost all has been said. I would like to convey three messages.

First, I thank Mr. Sidikou and Mr. Zerihoun. We fully support their efforts and work. We know that this is a very difficult time for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for the entire Great Lakes region and that is why their briefings and recommendations are especially valuable to us.

My second message is an urgent one — there is no time to waste. The Security Council has been committed for decades to the situation and to restoring peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the most recent proof of that fact was our visit to the country. We are all very aware of the threat of political instability looming over the country. That is why we must redouble our preventive diplomacy efforts. Each passing day counts. We must continue working until an inclusive and comprehensive agreement is reached among all of the country's political leaders. The date of 19 December should not be a fatalistic one. If we all work together, it should be a date on which we all celebrate a peaceful political transition agreement.

My third message is one of support. In the Council, we have supported each and every initiative to ensure a peaceful transition of power in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We support the appointment of new Prime Minister Badibanga. We believe him to be open, flexible, non-authoritarian and a man of good will. He is a true bridge to dialogue with the opposition, rather than an instrument of the Government or a traitor to the post, as the most radical have set him out to be. He is someone we must support if we wish to find a good faith solution.

We must also support the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, which has done a remarkable job and has recently overcome the significant obstacle of having been rejected and accused as been exceedingly unfavourable towards the opposition. We must continue to support it because we believe it to be a key instrument for inclusive dialogue and for reaching an agreement. We also obviously support the unity of the Security Council, as demonstrated once again in the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2016/18 earlier this evening. The statement sends an appropriate message and strikes a balanced tone. We also wish to join France

in thanking all delegations for their efforts towards and commitment to achieving our success. The presidential statement is not an end in and of itself, but rather one more milestone in a sustained effort that the Council must make in order for the Democratic Republic of the Congo to return to political normalcy.

I now resume my function as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and express how honoured we are to have you preside over the deliberations of the Security Council for the month of December. I extend a warm welcome to the friendly country of Spain, with which the Democratic Republic of the Congo enjoys an excellent relationship based on mutual respect.

I would also like to pay tribute to the President of last month's deliberations, the representative of Senegal, and thank him for the way he steered the deliberations of the Council in November.

Finally, Mr. President, I thank you for having taken the initiative of convening this meeting, thereby enabling the Council to once again sit and consider the situation in my country.

After the briefings of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, allow me to speak briefly about the security situation that the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) are pursuing in the east of our country — the fight against armed groups, particularly the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). While the attacks of the FDLR are sporadic, the clashes with the ADF — as the army has consistently pointed out — represent an asymmetric war because the enemy uses guerilla tactics and avoids direct confrontation, preferring ambushes. These enemies of peace have perfected their mode of operations. They infiltrate the civilian population and then attack them, at times drawing them in by wearing the uniforms of the FARDC. The international composition of that terrorist force, which consists of rebels of over six nationalities, deserves the attention of the international community.

Nevertheless, I must point out that for nearly a month, Beni has enjoyed a certain calm and the population has been able to go about its business. In late September, the military court in Beni, North Kivu, began to deal with crimes carried out against the civilian population of that region by holding hearings against members of the ADF who were captured during FARDC operations, with the support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Death sentences have been handed down.

Allow me to also mention an element from South Sudan, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, which is now on our territory. Indeed, in order to preserve friendly relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of South Sudan; avoid an atmosphere of suspicion with countries with which we share a long border; and no longer expose the long-suffering population of eastern Congo to the presence of foreign rebels, my Government has already informed the Council and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the decision taken by the Congolese people. We do not want Sudanese or South Sudanese elements — the Sudan People's Liberation Movement — on our territory. That Government position was reiterated to Council members by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo when they visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Considering that the situation does not seem to be moving in the direction the Government would like, the Permanent Mission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will once again address that issue through a note that it will present to the Council.

Allow me to also comment on the situation following the dialogues and the electoral process. The Head of State, respectful of the commitments undertaken by the States parties to the dialogue through the political agreement of 18 October, have recently — as many have pointed out — named a new Prime Minister from the political opposition. The long-awaited Government of national unity will soon be made public, with the primary mission of organizing presidential and legislative elections at the national and provincial levels, to be held in April 2018. In the meanwhile, the review of the voting register, which was launched in July, has been registering voters in 12 of the country's 26 provinces, and we have also started deploying electoral kits to all provinces. This

process will be completed by 31 January 2017, with the logistical support of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Independent National Electoral Commission plans to close the operation of revising the voting registry by 31 July 2017.

Pursuant to paragraph (b) of article V of the political agreement for the holding of calm, credible and transparent elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the convening of the electoral body by the Independent National Electoral Commission will occur on 30 October 2017. All the details of the electoral timetable will soon be made public by the Independent National Electoral Commission. Confidence-building measures to further ease the political environment and to foment trust among the political stakeholders are also part of the tasks of the national unity Government that will soon come into being.

In this difficult period for my country, my Government greatly appreciated the visit made by the members of the Council to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 11 to 13 November. The Government is working on the recommendations made by the Council to maintain peace and security across the country. I wish to assure the Council that my country remains committed to respecting human rights. My delegation can affirm without hesitation that the Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the countries of the region that is most respectful of human rights and whose democracy is among the most advanced and dynamic. It is true that not everything we do is perfect, but I assure the Council that efforts are being made to move forward.

My Government cannot restrict freedom of expression and assembly in a country of 400 political parties and 800 press and media organizations. The protective measure taken by the Governor of the city of Kinshasa to suspend public demonstrations for a certain time is not intended to stifle democratic expression. It has been taken solely for the purpose of protecting the population, which still bears the trauma caused by the sad events of 19 and 20 September.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes once again to express to the Council the gratitude of the Congolese people and their Government for the efforts of the United Nations to ensure peace and stability in their country. We take this opportunity to pay a final tribute to His Excellency Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon, to whom our people will remain indebted for all the achievements of the universal Organization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during his tenure.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.